The Rapture Is Wrong: The Saints Don't Rise to Run Away

Cecil Maranville

Nov 1, 2008

8 minutes read time

The Bible says the saints rise to meet Christ at His return. But they aren't snatched away to heaven. They rise in the air to perform a fitting salute to the King of Kings and then join Him, not in heaven, but on the earth. If this is different from what you have heard or believed, you need to prove what the Bible actually says!

In Part 1 last issue, we showed that the rapture wasn't taught until approximately 1,800 years after Christ began the New Testament Church!

Today's teachers of the rapture weave numerous biblical references into their narratives, but John Darby and other early rapture advocates based their belief on two verses: 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

In particular, they believed the words "shall be caught up" in verse 16 conveyed the idea that Christ would snatch the saints away. Combining this with the biblical teaching that God would protect His people in the end-time Tribulation, they projected that Christ would take the saints to heaven during that period.

Doctrine must come from the Word of God, not the word of man. What does God's Word say? As Part 1 of this series explains, the Greek for this phrase conveys a sense of force and suddenness, but it doesn't suggest abduction or snatching away.

Paul was comforting members of the Church of God in Thessalonica who were grieving over believers who had died. The survivors feared that their loved ones would lose out on participating in God's glorious Kingdom. Christ inspired Paul to put in plain words the truth of the matter. Those who died didn't go to heaven.

They were in their graves. But that didn't mean they would lose out on the marvelous Kingdom of God or that the believers still living would have any advantage.

"We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep [dead]" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Paul's message was that the dead would rise. The biblical term for rising from the dead is *resurrection*. A parallel reference is 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, which plainly tells us that God resurrects deceased believers to spirit at "the last trumpet," the same "trumpet of God" mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Verse 51 of 1 Corinthians 15 also reveals that God will also change to spirit those believers still living at Christ's return.

That change is what enables the saints to rise in the air to meet Christ. Human beings can't just go up in the air! But spirit beings can! In the first resurrection, God changes mortal saints into immortals (1 Corinthians 15:53).

The rapture theory says Christ takes the saints to heaven to spare them from the Great Tribulation. But spirit beings don't need to be rescued from anything that the physical realm might inflict. They can't be hurt by physical events. It therefore makes no sense to think that Christ must take them to heaven to protect them from the evils on earth.

The trumpet tells us the timing

What is the significance of the trumpet of which Paul wrote? The book of Revelation tells of seven trumpets sounded by seven angelic beings at the end of the age. The drama builds through each event announced by a trumpet blast until the seventh and final angel sounds. His announcement is the finale, the last and greatest event: The return of Jesus Christ to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth.

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15).

Scripture doesn't allow for a rapture of the saints to heaven for an interim of several years! To the contrary, "the last trumpet" announces Christ's return to rule over the earth. Reading the full message of Revelation along with Matthew 24 shows that the timing is critical; that human governments are in the process of

destroying the earth. Jesus comes not only for spiritual salvation, but also to save humankind from destroying itself. It is an emergency demanding immediate intervention.

You can read about this in our booklets **The Book of Revelation Unveiled** and **You Can Understand Bible Prophecy**.

Allowing the Bible to interpret itself, it is unmistakably clear that Christ comes to the earth at the time described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 to fulfill the countless prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, the King of Kings, to save the world. Considering all this, it is unreasonable to say that He comes briefly only to leave, not to return for years!

The ancient prophecy of Zechariah confirms the immediacy of Christ's intervention on the heels of history's greatest crisis.

"Behold, the day of the LORD is coming…For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (Zechariah 14:1-4).

Throughout the Bible, "the day of the LORD" refers to the time of God's intervention in human affairs. It does not come subtly, stretched out over years, but rather with suddenness and with force—the precise sense of the Greek word translated "shall be caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

Protection for the saints

Therefore, believers aren't taken off the earth during the Great Tribulation. But God *will* protect believers during this time of stress. The most specific reference to the protection that God promises for His people at the end of the age is in Revelation 12.

Revelation 12:14 says, "But the woman [symbolic of the Church of God] was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness *to her place,* where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent."

There is more to the story. The context tells us that at least part of God's Church

will suffer persecution while God protects the rest of the Church. "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (verse 17). Most likely, the result of this persecution will be martyrdom.

The Bible records many ways by which God protected His people in the past, but does not reveal specifically how, where, when—or even all of the "who" that He will protect in the end. However, we can have confidence that He will reveal what we need to know at the essential time. In the meantime, our focus must be on the spiritual preparation for Christ's return and the establishment of our Father's Kingdom (Matthew 24:38-51).

Why the saints rise to meet Him

There is one question yet to answer: Why would the saints rise to meet Christ in the air, when He is on His way to the earth to defeat evil and to establish the Kingdom of God here? Why not simply wait for Him to arrive?

Those who teach the rapture make much of this issue, claiming that it buttresses their theory. In fact, the truth of the matter actually further discredits their erroneous teaching.

We need to look at the meaning of the Greek term translated "to meet" that Christ inspired Paul to use in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Dr. Leon Morris writes in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries:* "The expression translated *to meet* is kind of a technical term 'for the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary'…and is very suitable in this context."

Notice that it pertains to a newly *arrived* dignitary, not to one who is merely passing through. In no way does it convey that Christ only enters the atmosphere and then reverses course, as He snatches believers away to heaven.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words adds that the Greek word "is used in the papyri of a newly arriving magistrate. 'It seems that the special idea of the word was the official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary'" (1985, "Meet").

The resurrected saints rise in a respectful gesture to welcome the arriving dignitary, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16). The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* notes that "when a king enters his city the loyal go forth to meet him."

As well, the word tells us where the saints go after rising to meet the returning Christ. F.F. Bruce's *International Bible Commentary* explains: "*To meet* is used in the papyri of the official reception given to a visiting governor, whom his citizens escort into the city from which they have come to meet him" (1986, notes on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Jesus' loyal subjects, the resurrected saints rise from the earth to meet Him as He comes to govern the world, and they escort Him back to the earth—at that time, not years later.

The same reference we cited above from Zechariah confirms this: "And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south… Thus the LORD my God will come, *and all the saints with You*" (Zechariah 14:4-5, emphasis added).

The truth of 1 Thessalonians 4

In conclusion, let's summarize what 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 actually says.

• Christ's return is proclaimed by an angel's trumpet blast; it is clearly not a secret matter.

• The fact that some believers had died doesn't mean they would be left out; they will be resurrected to join Christ as He returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

• Living believers will also be changed to spirit to join those resurrected from the dead.

• All the saints will form a welcoming party that rises to meet Christ and escort Him back to earth; absolutely nothing is said or implied about going to heaven.

In related scriptures, we have seen that Christ indeed continues through the air to the earth after the saints meet Him. His return is the prophesied second coming, not a clandestine snatch and grab of the saints.

We have also seen that the resurrected saints who meet Christ will immediately begin to serve with Him in the Kingdom of God on the earth (Revelation 20:6).

There is no rapture. There *is* a resurrection at the second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Original Link:
https://www.ucg.org/world-news-and-prophecy/the-rapture-is-wrong-the-saints-dont-rise-to-run-away